



State Senator Jackie Speier

District Update



8th Senate District

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UPCOMING EVENTS

For Senior Citizens

March 10 – The Older Driver's Traffic Safety Seminar

March 20 – Medicare Part D Seminar in Cantonese

For Youth

March 4 – Girls' Day Conference

March 9 – Young Women's Health Conference

All events are free to the public. For more information, look inside this newsletter, call our office or visit www.sen.ca.gov/speier.

March 2006

A Message from Senator Speier

I am proud to have fought long and hard for consumers and taxpayers.

My latest quest fighting government waste recently led me to look into the great abyss of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. This newsletter has information about recent Senate Select Committee on Government Cost Control hearings that I chaired which did just this.

There is also an article about Medicare Part D relating to senior citizens' use of the Internet, and part two of an article summarizing new laws that became effective on January 1, 2006.

Last, but not least, you will find information about upcoming events that I am hosting in my district.

I invite you to share your thoughts about these and other issues by contacting my staff and me through www.sen.ca.gov/speier or by contacting one of my offices.

All the best,
Jackie Speier

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Medicare Part D: A Virtual Prescription for Disaster

Among the many problems with the new Medicare Part D prescription drug program is that the materials used to explain it are written in Greek. At least that's how it feels to senior citizens who have discovered that the best source of information about Part D is on the Internet – a virtual foreign country to most of America's over-65 population.

Since the federal government rolled out the complicated Part D program on January 1, many seniors have approached me for guidance. In response to their concerns, I have hosted a series of meetings for senior citizens in my district to learn about Part D and I will host more of them. At these events, Medicare experts help seniors navigate the Part D maze of health plans and drug benefits.

A question that often comes up at these workshops is: Why did the federal government decide to put most of the information about Part D on the Internet?

Congress overlooked an important fact when it designed the program in 2003: many seniors do not have computers, Internet access, or the desire to surf the World Wide Web.

Although some seniors balance their checkbooks online and read the morning news in a digital format, a 2004 Pew Internet & American Life study showed that only 22 percent of them used the Internet. Another Pew study in 2003 showed that only a dismal 6 percent of people 65 and older reported accessing information from a government website. While these numbers are rising, they're still too low to be the primary source for critical health care information that can mean life or death for some people.

Doesn't anyone in Washington have grandparents? All they had to do was ask them or their own parents before they created Medicare Part D.

The California state government is helping seniors navigate Part D the old-fashioned way – using "snail mail," better known as the U.S. Postal Service. The California Department of Health Services (DHS) mailed a series of notices to more than 1 million Californians enrolled both in Medi-Cal and Medicare. The letters, in 12 languages, explain Part D, how it may impact seniors and what steps they can take to ensure that they continue to get their needed medications.

For those who require more help navigating the web or deciding which plan is right for them, the Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP), a non-profit group, has experts who counsel recipients about Part D. I have enlisted some of these experts to explain Part D in detail at my senior speaker series, and seniors have found them helpful.

Can more be done to help seniors cross the digital divide and help them "surf the net" as well as a 10-year-old? Absolutely!

This is an opportunity to think creatively, for children to reach out to their parents and grandkids to hold their grandparents' hands as they step into cyber-space. Businesses, schools and other groups should forge partnerships to help seniors in need. Web-savvy seniors should help their peers more at ease with a paper and pen than with a mouse and the web.

One lesson learned from the confusion created for seniors by over-relying on the Internet for Medicare Part D is that bridging the digital divide will likely require an ongoing effort for generations to come.

For information, contact: California Department of Health Services at (916) 636-1980, the federal Medicare hotline at (800) 633-4227, or HICAP at (800) 434-0222.

Fighting Government Waste & Fraud

I chair the Senate Select Committee on Government Cost Control which investigates government waste and fraud. The committee's February 27, 2006 examined how the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) contracts out for drug treatment services provided to inmates and parolees.

At the hearing we uncovered evidence that state money for substance abuse treatment services was used by private treatment contractors to buy vehicles, cameras, musical equipment for a rock band and department store gift cards.

We identified a history of a lack of oversight over contracts and attempts to protect treatment programs that were not working well. The committee subpoenaed five department employees who were fearful of retaliation from their supervisors if they

testified. These state workers were courageous in their testimony and their efforts should save the department extensive amounts of money in the coming year. I applauded them loudly.

The contracting problems were first discovered at hearing that I chaired last November when an employee reported that \$500,000 in drug treatment funds were used to purchase movie-making equipment. In that case, the department admitted that the purchase violated contracting rules and it confiscated the equipment after the hearing.

For a background paper about this issue, please visit www.sen.ca.gov/speier, go to "Committees" then "Select Committee on Government Cost Control" then "Publications" then "Informational Hearings" then "Backgrounds" then "02-27-06 OSAP Briefing Paper."

University of California Oversight

As a member of the Senate Education Committee, I have been sharply critical of UC for its lack of transparency and flagrant violations of its executive compensation policies. The committee has held two hearings at which UC President Robert Dynes assured members that UC will do better and that steps have been undertaken to ensure that unfair payment practices are stopped. While UC is conducting its own review, I have requested the State Auditor to examine UC's pay practices. The Auditor's report should be available in early May.

Nevertheless, I believe it is imperative that UC begin to address the very real problem of pay inequities among its hardworking support staff including librarians, clerical workers, and custodians as well as its world renowned teaching faculty. I have spent the past year conducting a listening tour of all 10 University of California campuses speaking with students, parents, faculty and administrators alike. Make no mistake, UC is California's crown jewel of higher education and one of the world's leading public institutions of higher learning. Unfortunately, budget cuts in recent years have resulted in unacceptable fee increases for students and caused many faculty members to leave. We can and must do better.

Upcoming District Events

For Youth

March 9 – Sixth Annual Young Women's Health Conference. I am sponsoring my sixth annual conference with UCSF Center of Excellence in Women's Health. More than 1,400 teens from my Senate district are expected at the day-long conference with many powerful women speakers, and more than 30 workshops on issues from self esteem, body image, and women's health to college admissions, job interviewing and starting a small business. Our steering committee is made up of local high school students. For information, visit www.ywhonline.org or call (650) 340-8840.

March 4 – Second Annual Girls' Day Conference. When my daughter Stephanie turned 10 last year I realized that she and her friends would benefit from a conference for girls their age. So, I organized this event to addresses their needs, such as bullying at school, difficult friendships, and school stress. Girls at the event will also hear from inspirational

women, and leaders in their fields. Parents are invited to participate. The Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health is sponsoring the event for a second year. For information, call (650) 340-8840 or visit www.girlsday.org.

For Senior Citizens

March 10 – The Older Driver's Traffic Safety Seminar. This event, in partnership with Kaiser Permanente and the California Highway Patrol Senior Volunteers, will be at Kaiser Permanente, 4141 Geary Boulevard, from 9:00 am to noon. The seminar, one of a series that I am hosting for older drivers will be interactive and informative. To register, call (415) 557-7857.

March 20 – Medicare Part D Seminar in Cantonese. This event at the Jackie Chan Senior Center, 5757 Geary Blvd., from 10:30am to 11:45am, is part of my ongoing effort to help seniors navigate the new, complicated Medicare prescription drug plan. For information, call (415) 557-7857.

New Laws Go Into Effect

Here is a summary of some laws that took effect on January 1, 2006, listed alphabetically beginning with "G". This is the second half of a list published in the last newsletter which is posted at www.sen.ca.gov/speier. More information about these bills can be found at www.leginfo.ca.gov (click on "bill information" and enter a bill number), or contact the office of the legislator who authored a particular bill.

Guns — SB 489 by Sen. Jack Scott requires that semi-automatic pistols have devices to warn if a live round is still in the firing chamber after the magazine clip is removed.

Health

Organ donors: SB 689 by Sen. Jackie Speier, starting July 1, requires the Department of Motor Vehicles to ask driver's license applicants if they want to sign-up to

be organ donors. DMV will print "donor" on their licenses if they enroll in the on-line organ donor registry.

Medical records: AB 800 by Assemblyman Leland Yee requires hospitals and clinics to note a patient's primary spoken language on medical records.

Pharmacists' objections: SB 644 by Sen. Deborah Ortiz requires pharmacists to fill prescriptions (often the issue is emergency contraception), regardless of moral or religious grounds unless they notify their employer in advance and find another provider to fill it.

Prescription drug labels: SB 292 by Sen. Jackie Speier requires pharmacists to include on pill bottles a description of the medication, including its color, shape, and any identification code that appears on the tablets or capsules.

Vaccines: AB 2943 by Assemblywoman Fran Pavley, starting July 1, prohibits pregnant women and children under age three from receiving vaccinations that contain specified levels of mercury.

Home Owner Associations (HOAs)

SB 137 by Sen. Denise Moreno Ducheny bans HOAs from foreclosing on a home for unpaid assessments under certain conditions.

AB 1098 by Assemblyman Dave Jones requires certain HOA records to be available to members and set rules for granting use of common HOA areas.

SB 61 by Senator Jim Battin, starting in July, requires HOAs to use secret ballots, creates procedures for some HOA elections, and prohibits use of HOA funds for campaign mailings for an HOA official.

Human Trafficking — AB 22 by Assemblywoman Sally Lieber makes trafficking of people for forced labor or services a felony punishable by up to eight years in prison, and allows human trafficking victims to sue for damages.

SB 180 by Sen. Sheila Kuehl establishes a task force to evaluate the programs for the victims of trafficking and related statutes.

Hunting — SB 1028 by Sen. Debra Bowen outlaws the remote killing of animals over the Internet and businesses that offer the shooting of live animals via computer.

Insurance

Auto Insurance: SB 20 by Sen. Martha Escutia allows low-income residents of Alameda, Fresno, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego counties who qualify to get low-cost auto insurance, starting April 1, and several other counties thereafter. Sen. Speier coauthored this bill as part of her long term effort to reduce the number of uninsured drivers. Among the bills she has authored over the last decade is one signed into law that requires proof of auto insurance when a car's registration is renewed.

Health insurance: AB 356 by Assemblywoman Wilma Chan requires health insurers to explain in writing why they denied a person coverage or granted coverage at a rate higher than standard.

Life insurance: SB 1105 by Sen. Jackie Speier prohibits life insurers from refusing to insure or renew policies based on the country to which the person has or is planning to travel unless substantiated by statistics.

Internet

SB 355 by Sen. Kevin Murray makes it a crime to trick people using the Internet into giving personal information such as social security or credit card numbers.

SB 97 by Sen. Murray makes it a crime for violating the state's anti-spam law.

National Guard

AB 980 by Assemblyman Tom Umberg guarantees that disability benefits for California National Guard members injured on active duty will be equal to those for federal soldiers.

AB 1666 by Assemblyman Dario Frommer allows Guard members called to active duty to cancel cell-phone contracts without penalty, get credit for college tuition,

waive state bar fees and get an extension on utility bills.

Parolee Tracking — SB 619 by Sen. Jackie Speier allows the state and counties to track criminals on parole and probation with Global Positioning System (GPS) devices.

Police Pursuits — SB 719 by Sen. Gloria Romero encourages police and sheriff's departments to adopt guidelines for when and how suspects will be pursued, and increases penalties for fleeing suspects.

Politician Pay — AB 11 by Assemblyman Hector De La Torre restricts how much city council members may pay themselves.

Sex Crimes

Incest: SB 33 by Sen. Jim Battin requires people who sexually assault family members under 14 to be treated as strongly as those who assault children who are not relatives.

Parolees: AB 113 by Assemblywoman Rebecca Cohn bars some paroled sex offenders from living within a half mile of schools with kindergarten through 12th graders.

Statute of Limitations: SB 111 by Sen. Elaine Alquist extends the statute of limitations for filing child sexual abuse charges to when the victim turns 28 years of age.

Trials: AB 114 by Assemblymember Rebecca Cohn allows evidence of a defendant's prior acts of child abuse to be allowed under certain circumstances during criminal trials for child abuse.

Sexual harassment — AB 1825 by former Assemblywoman Sarah Reyes requires employers with 50 or more employees, including the state government, to train supervisors about sexual harassment rules at least once every two years.

Transgender persons — AB 1586 by Assemblyman Paul Koretz bans insurers and health care providers from denying coverage solely because a person has changed gender.

Veterans — AB 1439 by Committee on Veterans Affairs increases the ability of veterans living in high-cost areas to get a home loan through the Cal-Vet Home Loan Program.

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The 8th Senate District includes the cities of San Francisco, Brisbane, Daly City, Colma, South San Francisco, San Bruno, Pacifica, Millbrae, Burlingame, Hillsborough, San Mateo, Foster City, Belmont, Woodside, Portola Valley, Half Moon Bay, the communities of Broadmoor, Montara, Moss Beach, and the Farallon Islands.